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Rich contra, poor contra: a sad saga

Some units need guns, others men

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica — Bankrupt and squabbling, anti-Sandinista rebels who fight in southern Nicaragua say they are suffering the worst crisis of the 4-year-old war.

The two largest rebel factions have about 2,000 active fighters and many more guns — but few bullets and little food. A new faction enjoying warmer relations with the CIA is flush with war materiel, but has only 300 men.

Suffering the most reverses has been Eden Pastora, commander of the south's largest rebel army. A social democrat, he broke with the Sandinistas in 1981 over their Marxist bent.

Two of his top aides said Pastora now leads 1,500 active fighters, compared to 4,000 when the U.S. Congress cut off CIA aid to the rebels last year.

On Aug. 7, Sandinista troops seized Sarapiquí, the fourth Pastora base overrun in a 5,000-man sweep down the San Juan River, which marks the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border and is a key rebel infiltration route.

The rebels, who now hold just one river base, have received only 10,000 rounds of ammunition since the offensive began May 26, said the aides, who asked to remain anonymous because Costa Rica bars them from taking part in military activities.

They said donations from sympathizers in the United States and Latin America — Pastora's lone source of income — fell to \$15,000 a month this year, down from the \$25,000 to \$40,000 a month they were receiving in late 1984.

One of Pastora's helicopters crashed last month in Costa Rica, slightly injuring him but destroy-

ing the uninsured aircraft, on which he still owed \$310,000, the aides said.

And Costa Rica, reacting to Sandinista charges that it was harboring the guerrillas, tightened its security and seized 70,000 rounds of rebel ammunition in the past month alone.

The aides also acknowledged that Pastora's forces in central Nicaragua have been forced to accept bullets and food from the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, a well-financed 12,000-man guerrilla army operating on the northern border with Honduras.

They denied the arrangement implied any loss of command by Pastora over his men. But former ally Alfonso Robelo predicted Pastora's men would fight for whoever feeds and equips them.

"Pastora does not count in this story any more," said Robelo, now part of the United Nicaraguan

Opposition, an alliance of political and guerrilla groups financed largely by the U.S.-trained and supported Democratic Force.

Privately, Pastora's rebels warn that a weak "southern front," led by moderates and liberals, strengthens the hand of fiercely anti-Communist rebels in northern Nicaragua.

"The south is the ideological counterbalance to the north," said Hector Dario Pastora, Eden's cousin and a spokesman for the Southern Opposition Bloc, an alliance of exiles based in Costa Rica.

Similarly broke is MISURASTA, a coalition of Miskito, Sumo and Rama Indians that claims to have 1,000 rebels fighting in their tribal homelands in eastern Nicaragua. Other Indian sources said it has 400 men, down from 2,000 early last year.

"Our supply situation is zero, zero, zero," said Marcos Hopping-

ton, the group's No. 2 leader behind Brooklyn Rivera.

The lone "southern front" leader gathering steam is Fernando Chamorro, another former Pastora ally who joined the U.S.-backed United Nicaraguan Opposition in June. Robelo said he has been "told by the Americans" that the United Opposition will be in charge of distributing the \$27 million in "nonlethal" aid to the guerrillas approved by Congress last month.

Rebel sources said that since joining the U.S.-backed United Opposition, Chamorro has received 500 automatic rifles, three air drops of ammunition and up to \$50,000 a month in cash to feed and clothe his 300 fighters.

Among Chamorro's fighters are three Cuban-Americans from the Miami area who arrived in early 1984 with 15 other Cuban exiles.

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Nicaragua Insurgent Groups

Here are comparisons of the three insurgent groups, as identified by their leaders, that are operating in southern Nicaragua:

EDEN PASTORA

Present Strength: 1,500 active.

Former Strength: Claimed to have 4,000 in spring 1984.

Weapons: Automatic rifles, light mortars, low on ammo.

Funding: No longer funded by CIA. Gets about \$15,000 a month from private sources in U.S. and Latin America.

BROOKLYN RIVERA

Present Strength: 400 to 1,000 active.

Former Strength: 2,000 in early 1984.

Weapons: Automatic rifles, light mortars, "supply situation is zero."

Funding: No known funding. Begs supplies from rival, CIA-outfitted Indian rebel group.

FERNANDO CHAMORRO

Present Strength: 300 active.

Former Strength: Less than 50 followers.

Weapons: Reported to have received 500 automatic rifles, three air drops of ammo in past two months.

Funding: \$50,000 a month from unknown sources.